



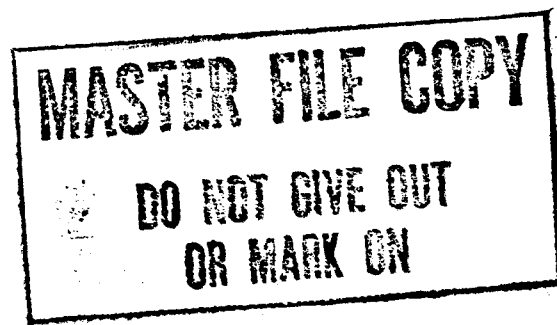
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## Guatemala: Major Towns and Other Important Features

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# Guatemala: Major Towns and Other Important Features

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## **A Geographic Reference Aid**

*Information available as of 7 April 1982  
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This paper was prepared by   
Office of Global Issues. Comments and queries are  
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## Guatemala: Major Towns and Other Important Features

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Guatemala is the most populous country of Central America with an estimated 7,200,000 inhabitants and the highest proportion of Indians—about 40 percent of the total population. Spanish is the dominant language, although many Indian dialects are also spoken. In size, Guatemala, with 108,800 square kilometers of territory, is comparable to Ohio. The great majority of the people are concentrated in the south, while large areas of the north remain practically unoccupied. Two-thirds of the country is mountainous and well over half is forested.

### Populated Places

The following cities and towns are the most important urban centers in Guatemala. Population figures are given in parentheses for each place; they should be regarded as rough approximations since reliable, up-to-date census data on Guatemala are lacking. The map grid reference follows each place name.

**Antigua** —H6— (25,000) was the Spanish colonial capital until 1773 when it was destroyed by an earthquake. Once the leading cultural center of Central America with a population exceeding 60,000, its main significance today is as a tourist attraction. Many of the old buildings have been restored and numerous cottage industries serve the needs of the tourist trade. Antigua is the capital of Sacatepequez Department.

**Champerico** —I3— (5,000) is a lighter port on the Pacific coast, about 45 kilometers from the Mexican border. It handles the coffee and cotton exports of the western portion of the agricultural Pacific Lowland. A rail spur connects the port with the main rail line which runs west to Mexico and east to Guatemala City. A paved road extends north to connect with the Pacific Highway near Retalhuleu.

**Chichicastenango** —G5— (4,000) is in the heart of the Maya-Quiche Highlands. Popular with tourists, the city attracts many Indians from the surrounding countryside for worship at the churches and to the markets where they sell their handmade wares.

**Chimaltenango** —H5— (17,000), capital of the department of the same name, is on the Inter-American Highway west of Guatemala City. Almost totally destroyed by the 1976 earthquake, it has been completely rebuilt. The town is situated on the continental divide and has a fountain from which water flows on

one side to the Atlantic and on the other side to the Pacific. The surrounding area is one of small Indian farms and craft cooperatives.

**Chiquimula** —H8— (25,000), capital of its department which borders Honduras, is approximately at midpoint on the rail line that connects the port of Acajutla, El Salvador, with the Caribbean port of Puerto Barrios. A road leads eastward to the border crossing at El Florido and on to Copan, Honduras. An airfield northwest of town is used by both the military and civilians. The surrounding countryside supports numerous cattle ranches.

**Coatepeque** —H3— (14,000), located in a large coffee-producing region, is the last important town near the Pacific Highway and on the rail line leading to Ciudad Tecun Uman on the Mexican border.

**Coban** —F7— (11,000), capital of Alta Verapaz Department, is the center of a rich coffee district. With the completion of the highway connection to the Atlantic Highway at El Rancho, much of the trade now goes directly to Guatemala City from the large farms, and Coban has become something of a backwater. However, with the discovery of oil to the north and the agricultural development of the underpopulated northern frontier, Coban will probably regain its stature as a commercial and transportation center. Alta Verapaz includes tropical rain forests as well as steep mountains and valleys; it is the scene of concentrated guerrilla activity.

**Cuilapa** —I7— (6,000), capital of Santa Rosa Department, is on the Inter-American Highway leading to El Salvador. A 13-MW hydroelectric power plant is located on the Rio Los Esclavos about 10 kilometers to the south; transmission lines extend to a substation north of town and connect with lines to the northwest and east.

**El Estor** —F9— (5,000), on the northern shore of Lago de Izabal, is the location of the EXMIBAL nickel refinery which exploits the local mineral deposits. Low worldwide nickel prices caused the closing of the plant in late 1980.

**El Progreso** —H7— (3,000), capital of El Progreso Department, is located on the busy rail line from Guatemala City to the ports of the Caribbean. Cattle ranching dominates the economy of the surrounding semiarid countryside. A large Greek-style Temple to Minerva is an easily recognizable landmark of the town.



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**Escuintla -H6-** (50,000), capital of its department and third in population in Guatemala, is the leading commercial center of the agricultural Pacific Lowland. It is at the crossroads of the Pacific and Inter-Coastal Highways and on the rail line from Guatemala City to the port of San José. Large cane refineries, coffee processing plants, stockyards, slaughterhouses, railroad yards, an oil refinery, and a thermal power plant are located in and around the city.

**Esquipulas -H9-** (9,000), about 10 kilometers from the Honduran border, is known for its statue of a black Christ which attracts thousands of visitors and pilgrims from all over Central America, especially on the town's fiesta day (15 January) and during Holy Week.

**Flores -C7-** (2,000) is the capital of Peten Department in the Far North, an inhospitable region of high temperatures and humidity, dense forests, and rampant malaria. Flores covers a small island in Lago Petén Itzá and is linked by a long, narrow causeway to the airport at Santa Elena. The Peten has undergone widespread development in forestry and farming over the past decade, but crowded Flores, with no room to expand, is losing its commercial dominance to other towns. The famous Mayan ruins of Tikal are located 50 kilometers to the northeast.

**Guatemala City -H6-** (1,200,000) is the national capital as well as the political, commercial, and industrial center of the country. It dominates the main urban corridor through the highlands and includes almost 20 percent of the total population. Most of the principal highways and the major rail line radiate from the city. La Aurora, the nation's only international airport and principal military facility, is located a short distance to the south.

**Huehuetenango -G4-** (16,000), capital of its department, is the chief commercial center for a large Indian region of both small subsistence and commercial farms. It is connected by a short road with the Inter-American Highway and is the last major town before arriving at the La Mesilla border post on the Mexican border.

**Jalapa -H7-** (40,000), capital of Jalapa Department, is situated in one of the most fertile valleys in the country. The last decade has witnessed broad commercialization of the local agriculture, with irrigated fields of vegetables and an important dairy industry developing.

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**Jutiapa -I8-** (11,000), capital of its department, is situated on the Inter-American Highway about 50 kilometers from the border with El Salvador. It lies in a semiarid plain of scrub vegetation, corn patches, and tobacco fields surrounded by hills and mountains. Nearby is an electric power substation with transmission lines connecting with the Los Esclavos Hydroelectric Plant to the west and to Jalapa to the north.

**Mazatenango -H4-** (30,000), capital of Suchitepequez Department, is an agricultural processing center of the Western Pacific Lowland; products include coffee, sugar, cacao, and tropical fruits. Mazatenango is on the Pacific Highway and the coastal railroad. Transmission lines extend east and west from a substation south of town.

**Melchor de Mencos -C9-** (4,000) is located at the Belize border about a four-and-a-half-hour drive on an all-weather road extending east-northeast from Flores.

**Panajachel -H5-** (3,000), a small Indian village on Lago de Atitlan was converted into a major tourist mecca in the 1970s with the erection of several high-rise hotels. As with other tourist centers in Guatemala, recent guerrilla action has caused almost a complete collapse of this profitable industry. Panajachel has a large foreign "hippie" community, a remnant of the late 1960s.

**Puerto Barrios -F10-** (25,000), capital of Izabal Department, is a port on the Caribbean that handles agricultural goods from both Guatemala and El Salvador. It suffered severe damage in the 1976 earthquake and has lost its once-dominant position as a port to Santo Tomas de Castilla, 6 kilometers to the southwest. It is the terminus of the rail line to Guatemala City. The Atlantic Highway and an airfield with a 1,500-meter concrete runway is located on the northeastern outskirts of town at the headquarters for the Puerto Barrios Military Base.

**Quezaltenango -H4-** (80,000), capital of its department, is the second-largest city in Guatemala. It is the commercial center of an important coffee growing region and has textile mills, food processing plants, and one of the country's two bus factories. It is the chief health center for the Indian-dominated Western Highlands. The town was destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 1902, but has been reconstructed with broad avenues, fine public buildings, and a large Indian market. Lying just to the south of the Inter-American Highway, Quezaltenango is linked with Retalhuleu by a winding, paved road with one tunnel.

**Retalhuleu -H4-** (30,000), capital of the department bearing its name, is the chief commercial center of one of Guatemala's richest agricultural areas—the western Pacific Lowland and adjacent uplands. Coffee plantations are located to the north and sugar estates to the south. Retalhuleu is on the Pacific Coastal rail line and on the highway to the port of Champerico. An electric power substation is situated a short distance north of town.

**Salama -G7-** (7,000) is the capital of Baja Verapaz Department and is on the road connecting Coban and the Alta Verapaz coffee plantations with the Atlantic Highway. Though small, Salama serves as the main political and commercial center for a number of villages scattered through the surrounding basins and valleys. A 69-kV transmission line extending to the north passes near Salama.

**San Jose -J5-** (12,000) is a lighter port on the Pacific. It serves the agricultural Pacific Lowland and is the primary receiving port of crude oil for the refinery at Escuintla to the north. Anchorage is in an open roadstead, one-half kilometer from the steel pier. Mooring buoys for tanker discharge lie offshore south of the pier. The airfield to the west of town is the headquarters of a Military Base Command and is the training site for pilots and the Parachute Infantry Battalion known as the Rapid Reaction Force. San Jose is the terminus of the Inter-Coastal Highway and the rail line from Guatemala City.

**San Marcos -G3-** (8,000) is the capital and chief commercial center for its department which lies adjacent to the Mexican border. The surrounding countryside is mountainous but includes a scattering of small Indian villages and subsistence farms.

**Santa Cruz del Quiche -G5-** (10,000) is the capital of Quiche Department. Numerous guerrilla activities and government counterinsurgency operations have been reported in this predominantly Indian department in recent years. The area surrounding the town is mainly one of small subsistence farms, but commercial agriculture is becoming increasingly important.

**Santo Tomas de Castilla -F10-** (20,000), on the Caribbean, has now superseded Puerto Barrios as the country's largest port and is the headquarters of the Guatemalan Navy. It handles agricultural and manufactured products and is the terminus of the new petroleum pipeline from the Rubelsanto oilfields. A free zone has been established by the government in an effort to stimulate export-oriented industrialization. Santo Tomas is connected by rail and paved road to Guatemala City and Puerto Barrios.

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**Santiago Atitlan -H5-** (15,000), on the southern shore of Lago de Atitlan, was once a colorful Indian village that attracted many foreign visitors. Today, with the collapse of the tourist industry and the increasing commercialization of agriculture, the character of the town and the surrounding area has changed radically.

**Sayaxche -D7-** (3,000), located on the Rio de la Pasion in the sparsely inhabited Peten region, is the focal point of new development and increased settlement. The town has become a symbol of economic and political progress in the northern frontier.

**Solola -H5-** (5,000), capital of Solola Department, is the chief political, service, and commercial center for a mostly Indian population. It is the only department capital even briefly taken over by guerrillas. The town is located near Lago de Atitlan on the old Inter-American Highway which joins the new Inter-American Highway 10 kilometers from Solola.

**Totonicapan -H4-** (11,000), capital of its department, is populated almost entirely by Indians. A thriving cottage industry centered here makes pottery for sale throughout the country

**Zacapa -G8-** (17,000), capital of the department of the same name, lies in a tobacco-growing and ranching region 40 kilometers from the Honduran border. It is the rail junction of the trunkline to El Salvador and the main line to Guatemala City from Puerto Barrios. Rural insurgency was crushed in Zacapa Department in the mid-1960s forcing guerrillas into a period of somewhat less intense urban terrorism.

### Major Transport Routes

**Railroads.** Guatemala is the only country in Central America with coast-to-coast rail connections. Its rail network is made up of two systems: the government-owned Railroads of Guatemala (FEGUA), with 819 route-kilometers, and the United Fruit Company (UFC) system, with 90 route-kilometers serving the UFC plantations. All lines are narrow gauge, single track, nonelectrified. The main line of FEGUA extends from the Caribbean ports to Guatemala City, continues southwestward beyond the mountains, and turns northwestward to Mexico. A major branch line runs from Zacapa to the El Salvadoran border; two shorter branch lines link the system to the Pacific ports. International connections are made with the

narrow-gauge line of the El Salvador National Railways at Anguiatu and with the standard-gauge National Railroads of Mexico at Ciudad Tecun Uman, where there are transloading facilities. Important rail yards are located at Guatemala City, Puerto Barrios, Zacapa, and Ciudad Tecun Uman. There are 14 tunnels and almost 600 bridges on the FEGUA lines.

**Inter-American Highway.** The Guatemalan portion of the Inter-American Highway extends from the Mexican border to the El Salvadoran border via Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Guatemala City, Cuilapa, and Jutiapa. It is a two-lane, asphalt-surfaced road with many curves, but few steep gradients, traversing a mountainous route that is subject to landslides and vulnerable to sabotage.

**Inter-Coastal Highway.** The Inter-Coastal Highway is an asphalt-surfaced road linking Guatemala City with the Caribbean ports of Santo Tomas de Castillo and Puerto Barrios and with the Pacific port of San Jose. The section from the capital to the Caribbean is also called the Atlantic Highway; it crosses hilly to mountainous terrain subject to landslides and road blockages in the wet season (May to October). Well maintained and heavily traveled, it crosses 64 bridges. The road from San Jose to Guatemala City traverses flat terrain as far as Escuintla and then climbs through high mountains to the capital; the latter stretch has 22 bridges.

**Pacific Highway.** The Pacific Highway passes through the agricultural heartland of Guatemala with coffee on the slopes to the north of the road and cotton, sugar, and cattle on the plains to the south. The two-lane, asphalt-surfaced road is the shortest and fastest route from Mexico across Guatemala to El Salvador. It traverses hilly terrain between the Mexican border and Escuintla with 76 bridges in that stretch; from Escuintla to El Salvador it continues through relatively flat farm country, almost at sea level.

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**Other Important Features**

**Electric Power -I6-** four of the largest power plants currently in operation—Guacalate (about 109 MW capacity), Jurun Marinala (60 MW), Mauricio (50 MW), and La Laguna (about 47 MW)—provide almost 80 percent of the electric power capacity of Guatemala's interconnected system. Power from all of these plants is carried to the capital by one 138-kV transmission line, the destruction of which would deprive the city of much of its electricity.

**Aguacapa Hydroelectric Power Plant -I6-** has a capacity of 90 MW and a new 230-kV transmission line to Escuintla.

**Chixoy Hydroelectric Power Plant -F6-** scheduled for completion in 1982, will be, with a capacity of 300 MW, Guatemala's largest power plant. It is being built to allow the thermal plant at Escuintla to be placed on standby reserve in order to reduce fuel imports and save foreign exchange.

**Chinaja and Rubelsanto Oilfields -E6-** Guatemala has rich oil deposits but the only producing fields are Chinaja and Rubelsanto near the Mexican border. Total output of the two fields at the end of 1981 was about 6,500 barrels per day. This low level of production is government imposed; the oil companies estimate that more than four times as much crude could be pumped from these fields. After processing at a small plant in Rubelsanto, the crude is transported via a 190-kilometer pipeline to Santo Tomas de Castilla for export. The pipeline and the processing plant have both been the targets of guerrilla attacks and the flow of oil was disrupted for several days in March and April of 1981.

**Escuintla Oil Refinery -I5-** operated by Texaco, has a capacity of 17,000 barrels per day. It is not capable of refining the high-sulfur domestic crude. Imported crude is transferred via offshore pipeline to tank storage at San Jose and then transported by tank car to Escuintla. Guatemala still relies on imported petroleum, mostly from Venezuela, for about 90 percent of its needs. Terrorist attacks against the Escuintla refinery have been reported.

**Santo Tomas de Castillo/Puerto Barrios Oil Refinery -F10-** was built by Shell and Chevron with a capacity of 11,000 barrels per day but has been inactive since 1975. It may be overhauled to handle Guatemalan crude. A pipeline connects the refinery with the port of Santo Tomas.

**Puente Belice -H6-** an important bridge on the Atlantic Highway, spans a deep gorge on the north-east outskirts of Guatemala City. Destruction of it and the railroad bridge immediately to the south over the same gorge would severely disrupt traffic between the capital and the Caribbean ports.

**Puente San Felipe -F9-** a long bridge over the Rio Dulce, is on the only all-weather highway linking the remote Peten region with the rest of Guatemala. It was opened to traffic in 1981.

**Indian Population**

The inset map shows those areas where Indians represent 60 percent or more of the population. Even in predominantly Indian areas, the balance of economic and political power remains in the hands of the Ladinos (non-Indians) who control the market towns and the major transportation facilities. The Indians, while not on the verge of a massive rebellion, are becoming less passive and more open to recruitment by insurgents.

**Areas of Insurgency**

Guerrillas have been active in many parts of Guatemala over the past few years. The map shows the general location of the areas of concentrated guerrilla activity or presence. Throughout Guatemala undefended or lightly defended targets are also subject to terrorist attack.



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